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ABSTRACT

Twenty-one activities that integrate music and the language arts in order to capitalize on children's interests are described in this paper. Topics of the activities are as follows: alphabetical order, pantomime, vocabulary building from words of a favorite song, words that are "the most (whatever)" from songs, mood words, a configuration clue mystery, nonsense word songs, reacting to music, rhyming, pronunciation, handwriting, spelling, poetry-choral speaking, composition (writing lyrics), writing letters to persons involved in music, crossword puzzle, song pluggers, researching the lives of composers or music artists, exchanging cassette tapes with another school, selecting theme songs for each student, and self-esteem. (MKM)

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Twenty-One Ways to Use Music in Teaching the Language Arts

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Children and music belong together. It is a shame if music stops at the classroom door each day or is considered merely a subject to be engaged in for 30 minutes a week.

Music can help make school a happy place. That reason alone would justify it being an integral part of our instructional day. But if we extend this and develop activities directly connected with the music to assist in the teaching of reading and the language arts we capitalize on the interest of youngsters and make learning a pleasant undertaking.

Here, then, are twenty-one ways in which music can assist us as we break ground on new skills, reinforce others, and enrich still others.

1. Alphabetical Order Children select a favorite song. After singing it they write out (or obtain a copy of) the lyrics which are transferred to 3x5 cards, one word per card. The word cards are then put in alphabetical order. This may provide meaningful added practice in handwriting skills.

2. Pantomime Children sing and act out the words or phrases from favorite songs. While this activity may seem geared to early primaries it has been used with success by intermediate grade children. It serves to introduce new or unusual words, gives children a chance to get outside of themselves--especially those shy ones--and may also serve as a listening experience.

3. Vocabulary Building The lyrics of a favorite song are written on a 3x5 card, one word per card. If a word is used several times it is written several times, thus may appear on a half-dozen or more cards. Youngsters spread the word cards out before them and select cards (words) to make sentences. Two youngsters, each using different songs, may engage in a game-like situation to determine who can make the most sentences, each using the word collection produced from the lyrics of his/her favorite song. Children then read sentences to each other. Such an exercise helps build sight word recognition and assists in developing sentence sense.

For your own information select any song in the current top twenty--the songs the youngsters hear and sing daily--and do a quick analysis of the words to determine those that appear on the "Dolch Basic Sight Word List." Here is what you will find: well over half the words in most of today's songs are on the Dolch list. I have had students analyze the lyrics of songs of their choice and generally we find that about 60% (70% is not unusual) of the running words in the lyrics are on the Dolch list. We have analyzed "MacArthur Park," "Songbird," "Time in a Bottle," "Bridge Over Troubled Waters," "Dreams," "Kooks," "Whenever I Call You Friend," and on, and on. Even the first verse of "The Star-Spangled Banner" totaled 48% and while that is not your typical top 20 number it did provide some very nice practice with words.

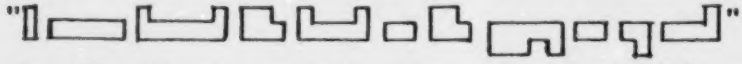
Words from lists, taught from lists, have little meaning and less interest. Let children bring in their favorite songs, sing them, and use the lyrics in your phonics programs and to expand sight vocabulary.

4. Words That Are The Most Children select the "Most Mellifluous," or the "Most Unusual," or the "Most (whatever)," word they have heard in a song for the week. A bulletin board is established for words of the week with a first place and three runners-up. This brings about additional sight word mastery, phonics practice, and leads into an "Odd Word" section of the bulletin board where we deal with spelling, meaning, etymology, and the like.

5. Mood Words Analyze favorite songs to determine the words used by a composer to create a mood. In this activity children deal with words that are more effective than "nice," or "good," and are thus provided an opportunity to recognize the value of precision: the power to say exactly what we mean, not almost what we mean. The precise word packs clout, something merely close does not. Precision is obtained through an expanded vocabulary.

6. Configuration Clue Mystery Identify for yourself four or five of the top tunes of the day. Select one and draw the configuration clues for the first

line of the lyric. The first line of the song, "Let Me Go," is provided as an example: "I never feared the devil or the gypsy in my soul"

"  "

Children are to identify the words for the configuration(s), explain how they solved the mystery, and supply the song title. You may have to provide a hint by listing the names of five songs, one of which is the correct one. The task of providing configuration clues is then passed on to the song detective who solved the mystery and so it continues. The mystery can deepen by removing the first line constraint and making it any line for a given five or six selections.

Obviously, the important thing in this activity is not so much the matching of configuration but the dealing with words, which is so essential to any reading program. Providing children with reading in which they are interested should be of the highest priority in our reading instruction. The lyrics of songs are words in which children have an avid interest.

7. Nonsense Word Songs Generate a few nonsense words which require the use of word attack generalizations you feel are important and which you intend to teach. Place the nonsense words in a song lyric which you have made up for a familiar melody. For example, for the melody to "Old McDonald Had A Farm," you might generate the new lyric, "When you see a little glike, It could be a blig." The child is to sing the song, pronounce the nonsense words correctly then provide a meaning for the nonsense words. You will accept any meaning response that makes sense using the context clues. For example, the child may say, "When you see a little dog, It could be a pet." Although many children pick up the skill of using context clues through what appears to be incidental learning, many do not. This exercise can provide insight into the group needing help with this skill. Finally, if the child pronounces the first "i" long (glīke) and the second "i" short (blĭg) you are aware of the child's ability to pronounce vowels in particular spelling patterns correctly, and you may end up

discarding the teaching of generalizations in favor of providing more free reading time, which may be the most valuable result of this entire activity.

8. Reacting To Music Of the several ways in which this may be implemented, here are just two:

a. Play a not-too-heavy classical selection on your record player. Have children simply react, indicating what thoughts or images are conjured up in their minds. This may be done in written or oral form. You might begin with Grieg's "Peer Gynt Suite," using "Morning," or "In the Hall of the Mountain King," as starters--all the selections in that suite are excellent for this purpose. Do not tell children the titles of the selection. That will provide another dimension as we try to generate titles for the pieces. Extensions of this might be researching "Peer Gynt," the writing of a folk tale by children, perhaps even composing an original melody. There is no end to the possibilities once you begin, and all provide opportunities to work in the language arts. An additional thought: Maurice Ravel's, "Pavane for a Dying Princess," (or, "The Death of Aase," from the aforementiond "Peer Gynt Suite") might be played and discussed as a means of dealing with death, a topic which so often is taboo but which should be handled with sensitivity and openness by the teacher. This could lead to a reading of The Tenth Good Thing About Barney, by Judith Viorst.

b. Play a piece of music and have children indicate a color that comes to mind when they hear it. Children discuss reasons for their choices and may illustrate them with crayons or paints. This presents an opportunity for everyone to react, communicate, and present an opinion in an environment that is safe because everyone is right.

9. Rhyming Note how various lyricists have provided rhymes for words. Have children try to find rhyming words or phrases for difficult rhyming patterns. Supposedly, "orange" and "silver" are not able to be rhymed. Perhaps groups of words might at least come close. It is said that Lorenz Hart (of

Rodgers and Hart) once rhymed the word "tapestry" in this manner--he used, "half-past-three." You may say, "Shades of Ogden Nash!" but it gets children to work with words. And speaking of Nash, do not overlook his verses to accompany "The Carnival of the Animals," (Saint-Saëns)--and do not miss playing that selection for your students. Do you recall Nash's verse that accompanies the "Elephants"? Here it is:

> Elephants are useful friends
> Equipped with handles at both ends.
> They have a wrinkled, moth-proof hide;
> Their teeth are upside down, outside.
> If you think the elephant preposterous
> You've probably never seen a rhinosterous.

Chances are 50-50 you have a potential Ogden Nash seated somewhere in your class.

10. Pronunciation If you have children sing into a tape recorder they will soon recognize the tendency we all have to poor pronunciation, the omitting of endings, general slurring, and running words together. The song is merely the vehicle, but an interesting vehicle is half the battle won, and that is what music provides. As a follow-up have a child say the lyrics into a tape recorder, listen to self, re-record until (s)he satisfies self regarding clarity of pronunciation.

11. Handwriting Have children write or copy the lyrics of a favorite song as handwriting practice. While somewhat contrived, maintaining a notebook of favorite lyrics provides a reason to attempt our best penmanship. Each student's favorites will be different but each will be practicing handwriting. This exercise can also provide for the incidental teaching of capitalization and punctuation.

12. Spelling Occasionally, the words from the various songs constitute the spelling words for the week. Certain of the words would be taught, anyway. Many will serve as a springboard to other words you feel are essential to be known, perhaps words having the same pattern of consonants or vowels.

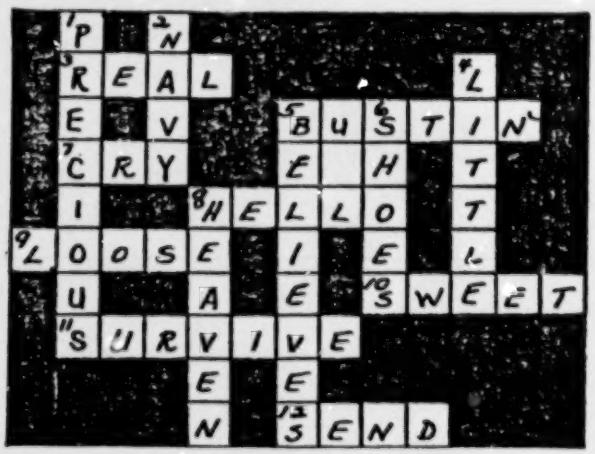
13. Poetry/Choral Speaking Lyrics can serve, at the very least, as motivation to involve youngsters with poetry of all sorts. Such poems as "Auld Lang Syne," "America the Beautiful," and "Battle Hymn of the Republic," may first be sung and then spoken as the poetry they are. Many songs (e.g. "Blowin' in the Wind") have a message and lend themselves nicely to the spoken form. In addition, music serves as a beautiful backdrop for the speaking of poetry, perhaps on tape or as a program where one group of children may entertain and enrich another group. All of this opens the door to poetry in general.

14. Composition (Writing Lyrics) Probably the easiest method of getting into this is to utilize melodies the children already know and to which they may put new words. For example, "Home on the Range," "I've Been Working on the Railroad," and "O Tannenbaum," are melodies familiar to children for which new lyrics may be composed. How about having children write commercial jingles for cat food, dog collars, or whatever? Also, children can write a state song, or a school song, or even a room song.

15. Letters to Have children write letters to a composer, a particular artist they like, a recording group, or even their manager. Sure, your students have written letters to authors of children's books. Then why not to a music artist? Play some popular selections by the artist, then have the children write. Not everyone has to write, but those interested will have a reason for doing it. Send the letters c/o the record company which handles the artist's work or obtain the address by having one of your students write to the "Ask TV Scout" column in your local newspaper. Another source for addresses is the newsweekly, Billboard, available at your bookstore or newsstand.

16. Crossword Puzzle Not the easiest task, but an interesting one is to have children make crossword puzzles in which all the entries in the puzzle are words in song titles. This does not have to be long and complicated as ten songs will do very nicely. An alternate to titles is to have all the entries

in the puzzle come from the lyrics of one song. Clues are given by quoting the title or song, deleting the puzzle word. Puzzles are duplicated and given to peers for solving. Below you will find a brief example using the titles of fourteen of today's popular songs. Purchase a copy of Billboard now and then, bring it into your room as a source for puzzle words. The various charts of top songs, albums, and so forth are listed weekly. The articles may provide interesting reading for many of your youngsters. Occasionally an advertisement may present material you feel is inappropriate for your readers. You may opt to bring in only the various charts. Such decisions are yours. Note: a supply of graph paper helps considerably as children--and you--attempt to develop a puzzle.



Down

1. _____ Love
2. In The _____
4. A _____ More Love
5. What A Fool _____
6. Dancin' _____
8. _____ Knows

Across

3. Got To Be _____
5. _____ Loose
7. Don't _____ Out Loud
8. _____ Texas
9. Every Which Way But _____
10. _____ Lui Louise
11. I Will _____
12. _____ Me Down To Tuscon

17. Song Pluggers Conduct a class/grade pep rally or promotion which involves voting for favorite songs or recording artists/groups with students acting as song pluggers, i.e. promoters. A student wishing to plug a song is required to develop a spiel--a promotional talk--on the virtues of the selection. The student presents the spiel to classmates and is allowed to play a brief excerpt of the song, generally from a record. The promotion is run over the course of a week, at the close of which class/grade members vote for one of the songs being promoted. This may be repeated as one wishes throughout the year.

18. Research Individually or in teams, youngsters research the lives of composers/music artists, modern or classical. Researchers present facts, anecdotes, and comments with very brief musical interludes from time to time to illustrate and to maintain attention. This may be done in an individual classroom or it may be shared by tying it in with the announcements for the day from the office, over the loudspeaker. Composers have birthdays to be celebrated; this is a way of accomplishing that celebration while providing a little of the limelight for the researcher.

19. Exchange Cassette Tapes With Another School Music can be used in many ways on the cassette tapes you exchange with other schools. In addition to providing a polished means of signing on and signing off it affords children the opportunity to deal in speaking activities such as identifying the music on the tape, making up riddles about their favorite songs, providing information concerning recording groups that interest them, introducing classmates who may play an instrument, and anything else that is appropriate. Once you start to record, the possibilities of using the various language arts on the tape are as limitless and unique as you and the children care to make them. The school with which you exchange tapes may be across the state or across the country. A letter from you to the superintendent of schools in another community, asking for the name of an interested teacher in a similar grade level will get things

started but you must take the first step.

20. Theme Songs Each youngster selects a song as his/her own theme song, providing a written or oral rationale for the selection. Begin with songs that have been themes for people children know. For example, you might use "Thanks for the Memories," (Bob Hope), or any theme from a popular TV show, such as "Happy Days," (Ron Howard or Henry Winkler) or "Welcome Back, Kotter," (Gabe Kaplan). These melodies are available on record or may be put on tape via the piano, guitar, or autoharp.

21. Self-Esteem Play "I Gotta Be Me," (on record by Steve Lawrence) or "My Way," (on record by Frank Sinatra). Have students write another verse putting themselves in place of the singer and indicating through their lyrics why each has "gotta be me," or why they did it their way.

Music makes any place a nicer place. Music ought to be called on regularly to help us start the day off at its beginning and wrap the day up at its conclusion. In this way we help make children happy that they are in school and increase their desire to want to return.